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SOUTH ASIA RESPONSE MANAGEMENT TEAM
SOUTH ASIA EARTHQUAKE TASK FORCE
DCHA/FFP FOR JONATHAN DWORKEN
ANE DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR MARK WARD
BANGKOK FOR OFDA SENIOR REGIONAL ADVISOR TOM DOLAN
KATHMANDU FOR OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR WILLIAM BERGER
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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN - EARTHQUAKE: USAID/DART UPDATE ON
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT OF RELIEF EFFORT

REF: 05 Islamabad 17853

Summary

1. Effective information management, implemented from the earliest stages of a natural disaster, can improve the quality of the humanitarian response. In the Pakistan earthquake, the UN introduced the cluster system without providing supporting documentation or comprehensive terms of reference and without internal information management capacity. The UN clusters did not prioritize data collection and information management, and disaster specific information strategies were not implemented by UN agencies immediately following the disaster. Information management at the cluster level remains an ongoing problem, and the UN's Humanitarian Information Center (HIC), which is responsible for providing technical advice and promoting data collection standards for the humanitarian community, currently does not have the staff or resources to assist. To strengthen the HIC and more effectively guide cluster-level management of information vital to relief and reconstruction efforts, the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) recommends that donors, including USAID, provide two liaison officers and a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist in the HIC specifically to work with the clusters. End summary.

Importance of Information Management

2. Effective information management during disasters is achieved by understanding what information decision-makers need in order to effectively steer the emergency response. The process begins with analysis: what do we need to know, how often do we need to know it, how can this information be made operational, who is responsible for the data management, what products will be produced, to whom will it be reported, what format will we use to collect the data, who will do the data collection, where will it be done, and what kind of training will we provide to support this process? A critical step to managing information effectively is to prioritize the process early in a disaster so information management becomes an effective tool to support decision-making throughout the response. Lastly, information management strategies should be developed in advance of disasters and then modified to fit the circumstances of the disaster rather than being developed during the course of the disaster.

3. One essential component of information management, particularly in a disaster, is geo-referenced data used to build maps that make sense of a chaotic situation. To determine gaps in coverage, it is essential to understand which geographical areas are covered and by which humanitarian agencies. The Pakistan earthquake response demonstrated the importance for geo-referenced data; the lack of spatial coordinates for critical locations has hampered the response. Less than half of the 300 known displaced person camps (spontaneous and planned) are geo-referenced. As a result, the humanitarian community does not have a standard list of the exact locations of each camp. In a recent shelter survey of 3,000 locations

conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is the head of the Emergency Shelter Cluster, surveyors did not collect coordinates, making it difficult to independently verify the results.

Agencies and Organizations Managing Information

14. Presently, several agencies are primarily involved with information management in the Pakistan Earthquake response:

a) The UN Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) - The HIC is a common service to the humanitarian community and provides orientation products including contact lists and meeting schedules as well as map products. The HIC initiated and continues to host weekly meetings for GIS users and information managers to coordinate efforts and prevent duplication of efforts. During this disaster, the HIC has been unfairly blamed for not providing information management for the Clusters. However, although the HIC has the responsibility for providing technical advice and promotion of standards for the humanitarian community to help them manage data and information more effectively, it is not responsible for data collection and internal information management within the clusters. That is the responsibility of the UN cluster heads.

b) UN Cluster Heads - As reported reftel, the UN Cluster system was introduced in Pakistan without first establishing internal information management support in the clusters. As a result, many clusters failed to establish an effective data collection system for information management within the cluster. When it became increasingly apparent that information was needed for decision making, the clusters initiated several uncoordinated and competing requests for data several weeks after the earthquake. Some hubs developed their reporting independently using non-standardized data collection forms-a situation that hindered uniform information analysis of all hub data.

c) The UN Joint Logistics Center (UNJLC) - UNJLC is a common service frequently co-located with the HIC. In Pakistan, the HIC and UNJLC were not co-located, but had strong collaboration, particularly among GIS staff. UNJLC works on pipeline data and provides logical support to the humanitarian community.

d) ACTED - A USAID-funded international NGO, ACTED set up and managed an information management and GIS system that was exemplary in its effectiveness. ACTED has used information management as part of their operations for several years. For the Pakistan earthquake, they were able to bring information management staff from existing operations in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

e) US Military - The US Military Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) information managers and GIS specialists coordinate with the USAID/DART and the humanitarian community and attend weekly meetings held at the HIC. The DAC has made a commendable effort to reconcile data and share unclassified products; unclassified information has been essential since it is more accessible to a wider audience.

f) USAID/DART - The USAID/DART GIS Coordinator, from the U.S. Department of State's Humanitarian Information Unit, worked in an advisory role with the HIC, represented the USAID/DART at information management meetings, and met with implementing partners to address information management and other issues. The USAID/DART collected standardized data on partner location, activities, coverage of assessed shelter and emergency relief item needs, commodities in the pipeline and materials distributed. The international NGOs were extremely helpful in these exercises. Data was shared with the HIC and UNJLC.

h) The GOP Federal Relief Commission (FRC) - The FRC hired an information management consulting firm to install an operations center at the Prime Minister's Secretariat and to provide guidance in information management. Although the operations center was completed, FRC indicated they did not have funding to staff the center. During meetings at the FRC, the humanitarian community provided data and information to the FRC and requested information from the Pakistani military on their relief activities. The FRC was unable to provide this, at least partly due to the fact that each of the three battalions working in the response use different non-standardized reporting formats. Although the HIC made a strong effort to resolve this problem, only summary information has been received from the FRC to date.

Information Management Gaps and Shortfalls

15. In early December, the head of the Emergency Shelter

Cluster suggested the creation of a Strategic Information Cell (SIC) in the HIC to achieve closer integration of data collection and management. It was proposed that FRC, UNJLC, and the Emergency Shelter Cluster provide staff. However, the SIC concept was abandoned by the Emergency Shelter Cluster head after three weeks of discussion.

16. Several agencies are working to identify and analyze gaps in the shelter and emergency relief item pipeline. On November 26, the FRC issued a report that provided some information regarding the total amount of relief commodities distributed thus far. The report did not, however, provide information on what commodities were available or needed.

17. On December 10, UNJLC asked donors to share emergency relief item data from their NGOs in order to determine the amount of emergency relief items in-country and in the pipeline. The request did not provide a standardized reporting format so the information returned required tremendous effort to consolidate. UNJLC entered all of the information in a Logistics Support Software (LSS) database to enable analysis. At present, the data entry process is still ongoing and by the time it is completed, the information will be dated. Additionally, accuracy of UNJLC's tracking is an issue as UNJLC relies on humanitarian agencies to supply and update commodity information. As UNJLC has not yet instituted a standardized reporting format, it is likely that they will continue to receive non-standardized data.

18. Poor information management leads to multiple and non-coordinated requests that fall heavily on the international NGOs. Many have complained that it is increasingly burdensome to try to meet the multiple information requests from hubs, clusters, donors, and offices such as HIC and UNJLC.

Recommendations

19. There continue to be urgent information management needs to effectively manage the humanitarian relief operation through the winter. If not addressed, the lack of effective management systems and geo-referenced data will also negatively impact the transition from relief to reconstruction. At present, there are no information management officers at the HIC to liaise between the clusters and the HIC. Based on respective expertise, the USAID/DART recommends that USAID provide a GIS specialist and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) provide two liaison officers to the HIC to work with the clusters to improve information management and provide timely processing of data. The USAID/DART has begun to discuss this idea with DFID representatives in Islamabad.

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